

Court Appointed Special Advocate Newsletter

Superior Court of Arizona Maricopa County Juvenile Division

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May 1999

A CHILD'S VOICE IN COURT

CASA PROGRAM WELCOMES NEW STAFF

With great enthusiasm, the Maricopa County CASA Program announces the addition two new coordinators, a recruiter, and a support staff member to the CASA team: Leslie Blakley, Melissa Adomeit, La Donna Moss, and Ginny Moore. Each comes from different backgrounds that will enhance the program and offer more resources to volunteers.

LESLIE BLAKLEY - COORDINATOR

Most of you already know Leslie Blakley who has been doing a lot of behind the scenes work as support staff for almost two years. She has been promoted to Coordinator and is happy to be working more directly with volunteers and support their advocacy efforts. Leslie is a graduate of Arizona State University and has a degree in Business Management. She has most of her work experience in the private industry. She worked in Washington D.C. at an international consulting firm where she was lucky enough to travel to Asia, Africa, and parts of the former Soviet Union.

Leslie was born in Honolulu, Hawaii and grew up in Ohio, Spain, Turkey and California where her military parents finally settled. She has one son who lives in the Sierra Vista area. She shares her house with four cats and a dog. We're excited to have her as a coordinator and certainly appreciate all the CASA knowledge she already brings with her.

MELISSA ADOMEIT - COORDINATOR

Melissa Adomeit is a new coordinator that comes to us from Connecticut. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Social Work from Central Connecticut

State University. She has worked with developmentally disabled adults in a residential setting and has focused on children and families since her move to Arizona in 1997. She was a CPS ongoing case manager and also worked at Family Builders providing resources to children and families in Maricopa County.

Melissa enjoys spending time with her husband, playing volleyball, reading and watching movies. She is looking forward to meeting volunteers and working together to advocate for children. Melissa is full of energy and enthusiasm and we are lucky to have her as part of our team. She is busy getting trained, but will soon have volunteers to coordinate. Welcome Melissa!

LA DONNA MOSS - RECRUITER

Welcome to La Donna Moss who is our long-awaited volunteer recruiter. Finally we have someone on board to focus solely on bringing new and different volunteers into the program. LaDonna is from Magnolia, Arkansas. If you've never heard of it, she invites you to come see her so she can tell you all about it. She came to Arizona to go to ASU for a degree in Marketing and now eight years later is still adjusting to the heat!

You may have noticed the increased play of CASA Public Service Announcements lately. She is responsible. Since she started, she has been very busy getting the word out to as many people as possible and it is paying off already. La Donna is excited to be working with the CASA program and likes the fact that we are working together to help children have better lives.

CASA Program Staff

Nancy Molever	506-5221
Laura Devany	506-4425
Leslie Blakley	506-4082
La Donna Moss	506-3930
Melissa Adomeit	506-3935

Shannon Childs	506-4415
Virginia Moore	506-4083



CASA Volunteer Mentors

Angela Ashley
Anne Donahoe
Margo Fitts
Jackie Flowers
Dana Gilroy
Lynda Pederson
Karen Tyrrell

Shannon Childs - Design/Editor/Production

Laura Devany - Co-Editor

VIRGINIA (GINNY) MOORE - SUPPORT STAFF

Ginny has been hired to take over the position that Leslie held in the front office. Ginny graduated from high school looking for a professional job with good benefits and found this with the county. She started working for the county at Rabies Animal Control in 1995. Working with animals was a very rewarding job. A problem that she found was that she got too attached to the animals and wanted to adopt every one! So she moved on to the Records Office where she found a very professional place to work.

Ginny's hobbies include snowboarding, camping and spending time with her dog "Sunny." She enjoys spending time with her family and the newest arrival of her niece. She is now looking forward to working at the CASA program, learning new skills and furthering her career with the county.

TIFFANY DITCHEK - COORDINATOR

Tiffany was a new coordinator who has left the program for personal reasons. We wish her well.

RESOURCES**THE FAMILY CONNECTION**

The Family Connection is a collaborative partnership of family and child service agencies with expertise in working with children in out-of-home care. Aid to Adoption of Special Kids, a leader in providing family support services to foster and adoptive families, is the lead agency and primary contact regarding the program. The Family Connection is made possible by a contract for family support and preservation with the Arizona State Department of Economic Security's Division of Children, Youth and Families.

What is the Family Connection?

The Family Connection brings together numerous community resources to increase the resiliency of foster and adoptive families. The national rate of adoption disruption varies between 10 and 25 percent, leaving as many as 1 in 4 children without a permanent family. Foster care children, who desperately need stability in their young lives, live in an average of three foster homes. The goal of the Family Connection is to maintain present placements whenever possible and appropriate.

The expertise and skills of each of the collaborative partners of The Family Connection is available to foster and adoptive families who are in crisis, or who

recognize their need for support services to maintain the integrity of their family.

Eligibility

Resident of Maricopa County
Foster, Adoptive or Foster-Adoptive Family

Connecting each family with the services most beneficial to them.

Families participating in The Family Connection project have a Family Specialist visit them in the comfort of their own home*. Based on the needs expressed by the family and the observations of the Family Specialist, a Family Service Plan is created that connects each family with the services most beneficial to the family.

As part of the Family Service Plan, each family will be identified as a Level I, Level II, or Level III family. Services available at each of these levels include:

Level I

Developmental assessments
Advanced training workshops
Information and referral
Mentoring from other parents
Support groups
Opportunities for socialization and recreation for parents and children
Peer group networks

Level II

All services available to Level I participants, and:
Intensive in-home mentoring
Parenting skills classes
In-home respite
Family Counseling

Level III

All services available to Level I and II participants, and:
In-home family preservation
Emergency respite
Intensive family counseling

If your family, or a family you know might benefit from The Family Connection, please contact Aid to Adoption of Special Kids at 254-2275. Our kids deserve stable loving families, and our extraordinary families deserve our support. *Participation is limited to 48 families.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Margaret Diaz	6	Carolyn Ford	18
Ginger Doyle	10	Kathleen Jorgensen	19
Rachel Geer	10	Mary Ellen Kane	23
Susan Putney	12	Barbara Seibert	31
Christina Wilson	13		

CASA SPONSORED TRAINING

May 6, 1999, 5:30 - 8:45, Post Orientation

Training - Attend follow-up training to the basic CASA Orientation. Topics covered will include Duties and Responsibilities of a CASA volunteer, case planning and court report writing, Title 19 eligibility and Model Court. All volunteers are welcome to come as a review or plan to attend the Model Court portion beginning at 8:00 p.m. Location: Juvenile Court Durango, 3125 W. Durango, Room 223. Please RSVP the CASA Office at 506-4083.

June 15, 1999, 11:00 - 1:00, Brown Bag Lunch

with Judge Portley - All CASAs are encouraged to attend this training session with Judge Portley to discuss non-specific case related issues. Location: Juvenile Durango, 3125 W. Durango, Room 474. Please RSVP to the CASA Office at 506-4083 by 6-11-99. Don't forget to bring your lunch!

CONFERENCES

May 15 - 18, 1999, Annual National CASA

Conference - The conference will include more than 50 sessions, workshops, round table discussions and presentations from national experts. Location: Kansas City, Missouri. For more information contact Becca Calhoun at National CASA, 100 W. Harrison, North Tower, Ste. 500, Seattle, WA 98119, or E-mail: becca@nationalcasa.org or call (800)628-3233. You can also visit the National Web page at <http://www.casanet.org>.

June 4 -5, 1999, Annual CASA/FCRB Conference, The Permanency Puzzle: Putting the Pieces

Together for Children - You are an important piece of the permanency puzzle! Materials fee of \$35 will be charged to non CASA/FCRB volunteers. Location: Embassy Suites, Phoenix, Arizona. Sponsored by Dependent Children's Services.

June 24 -25, Family Centered Practice

Conference '99 - The Fourth Annual Family Centered Practice Conference is an intensive, state-wide training and networking experience featuring nationally recognized experts in the field of family-centered services. Location: YMCA Leadership Center, 9940 N. 25th Avenue, Phoenix, Arizona. 85021. For more information or sponsorship information contact Family Centered Practice Conference '99 at (602)759-9592, Fax (602)759-6799 or E-mail at: wendy@kc-a.com.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Nancy Molever has been designated as the Program Manager for the Maricopa County CASA Program. Nancy's duties will include: Administrative oversight and management of the program, staff development and supervision of volunteers. CONGRATULATIONS NANCY!

KUDOS FOR CASA

CASA was the 1999 recipient of the "Cherish the Children" award presented by the Greater Phoenix Child Abuse Prevention Council. The awards luncheon was held on April 28, 1999 at the Orpheum Theater. A big THANKS to all of our volunteers.

CASA volunteer Angela Ashley, is the 1999 winner of the J.C. Penny "Golden Rule" award. Angela Ashley has been a CASA since October 1993. She has had a total of 5 cases, serving 7 children. Angela is also a mentor for new volunteers. CONGRATULATIONS!

All of our CASA mentors will be honored at the DOVIA Recognition Luncheon on May 3, 1999. Congratulations are in order for Jackie Flowers, Angela Ashley, Lynda Pederson, Karen Tyrrell, Anne Donahoe, Margo Fitts and Dana Gilroy. GREAT JOB!

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

SB 1116 - Expedited Adoption (Petersen) Would change the adoption certification process for licensed foster parents and certain relatives; would eliminate the interim placement report to the court and transfers the assessment components to the social study required for the final hearing; provides the social study for step-parents and relatives not previously involved with state agencies is not necessary unless ordered by the court; reduces certain time frames for finalizing adoptions; allows communication agreements between an adoptee child, adoptive parents and a birth parent enforceable under specific conditions, but allows adoptive parents to revoke in person contact at any time; appropriates \$1.5 million to assist in securing adoptive homes for children. (3/3 Passed Senate 29-0-1-0; Assigned to: House CFIDS, Appropriations; 3/16 Passes CFIDS; 3/23 Passed Appropriations; 3/30 Passed Rules)

Description - SB 1116

Purpose - Appropriates \$1.5 million in general funds for adoption services. Streamlines several adoption processes to reduce the length of time and costs for children awaiting adoption.

MAY 1999						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						1
2	3	4	5	6 Post O.T. 5:30-8:45 p.m. Juvenile Court Durango- Room 223 RSVP by 4-30	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15 National CASA Conference Kansas City, Missouri
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31		<p>Volunteer Mentors are holding monthly Peer Groups. If you would like to attend one of them please contact your mentor for upcoming dates.</p> <p>*If you have been a CASA for 2 years or more and would like to learn how you can become a mentor, please contact your CASA Coordinator. Volunteer mentors are not required to be assigned a case. This has recently been changed.</p>			

-Legislative Update Continued

Background - The number of children in foster care increased 63 percent over the past five years. Almost 45 percent of the current population have been in care over two years. Many of these children cannot return to their birth families. Laws 1998, Chapter 276 established the Model Court program, which requires the court to make permanency decisions more quickly but does not address the resulting increase in the number of children awaiting adoption.

Most children adopted by relatives are first made wards of the court, even in private dependency actions. There has been a Child Protective Services investigation and court approval of the plan of adoption by the relative. When both parents have died or relinquished their parental rights, however a family member willing to assume responsibility may petition to adopt the child without the child first becoming a ward of the court. Prior to 1995, the court provided simplified social studies at little or no charge for stepparents and relatives adopting noncourt wards. All counties except Pima County have eliminated this service, and private agencies are now charging from \$400 to \$1200 for a full home study.

The Adoption Review Team estimated that the proposed legislative changes will decrease the average length of time between a child becoming free for adoption and final order of adoption from two years to nine months.

Amendments Adopted by Family Services Committee

1. Expands "relatives" to include adult siblings and clarifies that relations may be by blood, adoption or marriage.
2. Allows a licensing study or previous adoption certification study to be updated with relevant information and limits the subsequent social study to background checks and updated reports.
3. Eliminates the social study requirement and probationary period for stepparents and relatives not previously involved with state agencies when the child has resided in the home for at least one year.
4. Eliminates the interim report to the court and transfers the assessment components to the social study required for the final hearing.
5. Expands access to expedited hearings by persons adopting infants and children placed by court order.
6. Imposes time frames for setting expedited hearings and allows exceptions to time frames for good cause.
7. Eliminates division review of verified accountings for the court and eliminates court approval of payments to both parents under \$1000.

8. Makes communication agreements between an adoptee child, adoptive parents and a birth parent enforceable under specific conditions but allows adoptive parents to revoke in-person contact at any time.

HB 2417 - Permanent Guardianship; Subsidy

(Anderson, Huffman, Horton, Solomon) Would allow ongoing financial assistance to families who assume permanent legal guardianship of dependent children in foster care; would allow children to have permanent homes and avoid unnecessary administrative expenses associated with foster care. \$105,000 would be appropriated to DES from the state general fund in FY 1999-2000 and \$124,000 in FY 2000-2001. (2/24 Passed House 53-3-4-0; Assigned to: Senate Family Services, Appropriations; Status: 3/10 Passed Senate Family Services; 3/17 Passed Senate Appropriations)

Description - SB 2417

What does the bill do? Establishes a Subsidized Permanent Guardianship Program within the Department of Economic Security. Allows for permanent placement of foster children who are in stable placements, but whose potential guardians cannot afford to care for the child without financial assistance.

When are permanent guardianships allowed?

Permanent guardianships are allowed when a child is adjudicated dependent and has lived in the home of the potential guardian for at least nine months. As required, reasonable efforts to reunite the child with his/her parents have been unsuccessful; and the likelihood of the child being adopted is remote or termination of parental rights is not in the child's best interests. The juvenile court reviews these circumstances and may approve permanent guardianships.

How many children my this affect? It is estimated that 160 children in foster care would benefit from this program.

How much is the subsidy? An average payment is estimated to be \$520 a month. The subsidy payment would vary with each case, but would not be more than an adoption subsidy payment which means that certain allowances provided in foster care would not be available.

What happens if the child is eligible for other financial assistance? The bill provides that the family would need to apply for all benefits the child is entitled to from other state and federal programs. Benefits from such programs would offset the subsidy payment.

-Continued on page 6

-Legislative Update continued

Children placed in with permanent guardians would be eligible for child only TANF benefits. Most children would be eligible for AHCCS.

Is there an on-going review of the subsidy? DES would review the case annually to determine if the guardian continues to be eligible and whether the subsidy amount is appropriate. The guardian must report changes to status of the placement during the year to DES.

COMMENDATIONS

At a recent Report and Review hearing, CASA volunteer Jennifer Reed-Morse was commended by the case worker. The case worker stated "Jennifer is the best CASA she has ever worked with!" Way to go Jennifer.

CASA volunteer Carol Scott is commended for traveling over 100 miles roundtrip to facilitate visits between siblings on her case two times a month. The kids appreciate your dedication and so do we!

Patty Hackmann is working on her first case, a model court case with five children, and doing a great job advocating for their best interests. Hang in there, Patty, you'll get a breather soon!

Judge Scott commended Deborah Donofrio for her zealous advocacy on behalf of her CASA child and her commitment to maintaining a bond with him. Great job Deborah!

FAREWELL

A fond farewell to Oonagh Boppart, CASA volunteer extraordinaire since 1991. Oonagh has advocated for five different cases involving a total of 17 children. She served as a mentor for the program for many years, helping countless volunteers through the difficult dependency system. THANKS OONAGH FOR EVERYTHING!

A few months ago, CASA volunteer Andrea Ritenour moved to California but managed to fly back to Arizona to see her assigned kids. She was able to keep up and do a good job on her case, stabilizing it to the point where she was no longer needed. Now that the kids are in permanent adoptive and long-term placements, Andrea is resigning from the CASA program and will continue to reside in California. Thank you Andrea for your dedication and we will miss you!

Farewell to CASA volunteer Laura Larkin. Thank you for all the hard work you did on your case. It's invaluable.

Goodbye to CASA volunteer Marie Ellis. You've been a trooper dealing with the complications of your case. Thanks for all your hard work!

CASA Volunteer Eileen Wells recently resigned from the CASA Program after four years and three cases. Eileen stated in her letter of resignation, "I have learned a lot during my nearly four years as a CASA volunteer." The program thanks Eileen for her service to dependant children.



CASA PROGRAM
Juvenile Court Center
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